

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., and his wife Marcelle greet former Vermont Gov. Phil Hoff, left, during a celebration of Hoff's 80th birthday held by the Vermont Democratic Party at the Firehouse Center for the Visual Arts in Burlington. Hoff's election in 1962 made him Vermont's first Democratic governor in over 100 years. FREE PRESS FILE

Vermont Gov. Phil Hoff dies at 93

April McCullum
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

MONTPELIER - Former Gov. Phil Hoff, the Democrat who ushered in a new era in Vermont politics in the 1960s, died Thursday. He was 93.

"Phil Hoff had great charisma, integrity and leadership skills," said Rep. Johanna Leddy Donovan, D-Burlington, who announced Hoff's death on the floor of the House of Representatives. "He was a personal hero of mine for decades."

In 1962, Hoff became the first Vermont Democratic governor to be elected in more than a century.

"A hundred years of bondage broken! A hundred years of bondage broken!" Hoff shouted in Winooski on election night, when he defeated Republican incumbent Gov. F. Ray Keyser by about 1,300 votes.

Someone gave him a crown, cut out of sheet metal, with the title "King of Winooski." Hoff later gave the crown to his friend Richard Cassidy.

"Phil represented the ordinary working people of Vermont," said Cassidy, who still keeps the crown in his office, "and it's an ordinary working person's idea of a crown."

Vermont has elected alternating Democratic and Republican governors ever since.

Hoff, a World War II Navy veteran and attorney, had served as Burlington's sole legislator in the House of Representatives at a time when each town and city had one representative. During his time as governor, the state reapportioned the House of Representatives to its current size of 150 members.

Hoff served as governor until 1969, overseeing a time of change that included a ban on highway billboards, abolition of the poll tax, an increase in state aid to education, the creation of union high schools and other new policies. He appointed the first Governor's Commission on the Status of Women to research discrimination against women and their

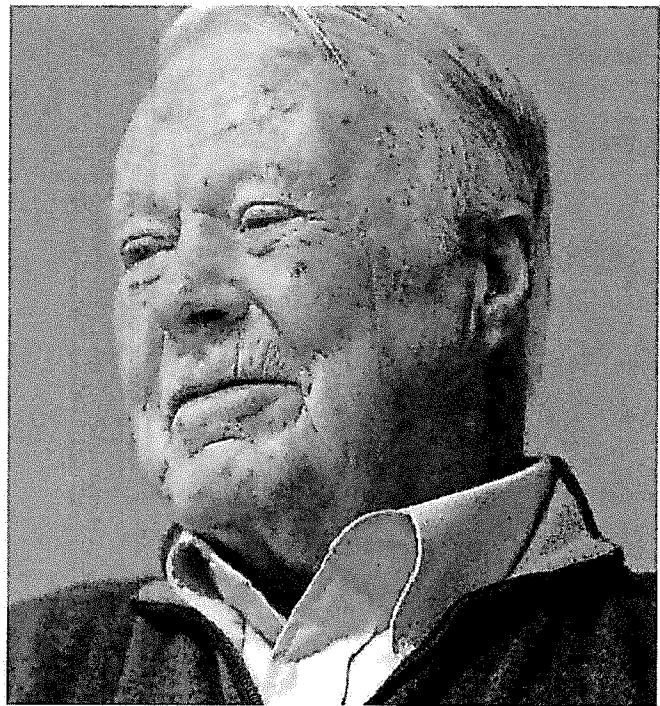
See **HOFF**, Page 4A



Gov. Phil Hoff shows Ladybird Johnson around during a visit in the 1960s. VT HISTORICAL SOCIETY/COURTESY



Gov. Phil Hoff in 1963. FREE PRESS FILE PHOTO

Former Vermont governor Philip Hoff in Burlington on Oct. 10, 2011.
EMILY MCMANAMY/FREE PRESS

Hoff

Continued from Page 3A

changing roles and needs.

"He brought youth and energy and ideas at a time when Vermont needed that," recalled Gov. Madeleine Kunin, the state's Democratic governor from 1985 to 1991.

During his last several years in office, Hoff spent countless hours on the road in a black Lincoln driven by his one-man security detail, Vermont State Police Trooper Mike Vinton.

Vinton was 22 years old when he was assigned to the governor. They became close friends, talking about the Red Sox and golf and anything else as they traveled.

"Phil was a governor that got around to see an awful lot of people," Vinton recalled in a telephone interview Friday. "We were on the road about every night and every day all throughout that time."

Hoff embraced civil rights and led the passage of a fair housing law that made it illegal to refuse to sell, lease or rent property to minority groups, one year before a federal law was passed.

According to an essay written by Cassidy, the legislation drew opposition from some who claimed that discrimination was not a problem in Vermont, and from others, including the Burlington Free Press, arguing that it infringed on private property ownership.

"There are few bills during my tenure as governor that I have derived such pleasure from signing into law," Hoff said at the April 1967 signing ceremony for fair housing and welfare bills, according to a report by the Burlington Free Press.

Hoff started the Vermont-New York



This is an image of the reception of the completion ceremony for Interstate 89 and the Highgate border crossing in 1966. The reception took place in Phillipsburg, Quebec, which is right across the border. This image shows Gov. Phil Hoff, center, talking with a man at the reception. Hoff is wearing "La Ceinture Flechee" which is a colorful sash and a tradition piece of French-Canadian clothing. Other men, all dressed in suits, can be seen milling around the room. COURTESY VERMONT STATE ARCHIVES

Youth Project, which brought teens from New York City to Vermont for summer programs in 1968. He also oversaw the formation of a civil rights commission, the predecessor of today's Vermont Human Rights Commission.

By ending the state's Republican dominance, Hoff laid the groundwork for Ver-

mont's first and only Democratic U.S. Senator, Patrick Leahy, to be elected in 1974.

"He was the first one who brought excitement to state government," Leahy told the Burlington Free Press in 2011. "He changed what had been a sleepy, declining state in many ways. He made Ver-

mont modern."

In a statement on Friday, Leahy called Hoff a mentor and a friend.

"He made a real difference in our state, touching and inspiring countless lives, in countless ways," Leahy said. "I am

See HOFF, Page 5A

Hoff

Continued from Page 4A

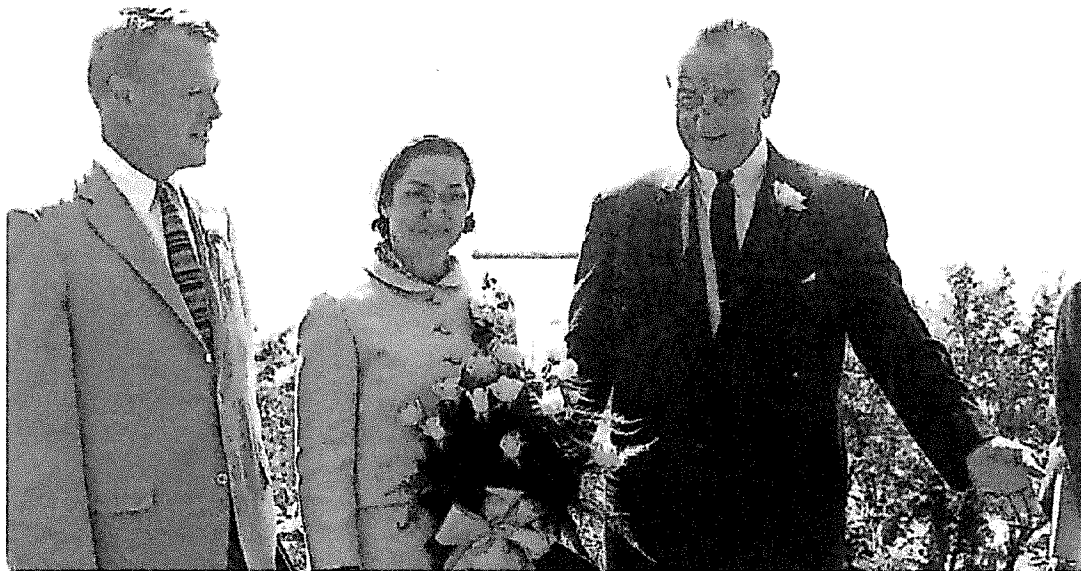
blessed to be one of those whose lives he touched. I will always be grateful for his life, his example, and his friendship."

Rep. Peter Welch, D-Vt., called Hoff a "kind and decent man who cared deeply about our state and those less fortunate." Welch praised Hoff for his work on civil rights and his decision to split with President Lyndon Johnson by opposing the Vietnam War.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., said in a statement that history would remember Hoff as "a man of great courage who not only helped transformed Vermont but was years ahead of his time in the fight for economic, social and racial justice."

By his final years as governor, Hoff had developed a reputation for problematic drinking, which he acknowledged after the House Republican leader made it public, according to a Free Press report based on a 2011 biography of Hoff. He ran unsuccessfully for U.S. Senate in 1970, then resumed his legal career.

The former governor returned to Montpelier as a state senator in the 1980s, where he worked to revitalize the Human Rights Commission. He remained involved in Vermont politics and served in 2007 on a citizens' commission that traveled the state taking testimony about same-sex marriage. Vinton, his



Gov. Phil Hoff greets President Lyndon B. Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson on a visit in August 1966.

COURTESY VERMONT STATE ARCHIVES

former security detail who was by then a former state legislator, also sat on the commission. Hoff attended Democratic campaign events as recently as 2016.

For nearly two decades, Hoff and his wife, Joan, spent winters in Las Cruces, New Mexico along with Vinton and his

wife. They played golf and attended social events and were all members of a weekly breakfast club, where Vinton shared the news Friday of Hoff's death.

Vinton recalled in an interview that Hoff was someone who could listen and relate to people from all walks of life.

"He was a good man," Vinton said. "very good man."

Contributing: Associated Press. Contact April McCullum at 802-660-1863 or amccullum@freepressmedia.com. Follow her on Twitter at @April_McCullum

Trailblazing former Gov. Phil Hoff dies

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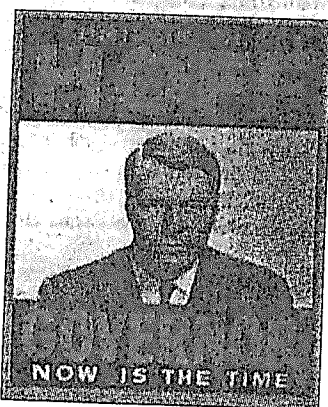
By KEVIN O'CONNOR
VTDigger

Philip Hoff was the Democratic candidate for Vermont governor in 1962 when he called his father in Massachusetts with an invitation to dinner on election night.

"I don't know," Hoff would remember his father saying. "Are you going to win?"

"Dad, they've never elected a Democrat by popular vote in the history of the state," the candidate replied. "I can't promise you that. But I think I've got a shot."

Americans today know Vermont as the home of Bernie Sanders and Ben & Jerry's. But back before the interstate and the internet, the state was the only one in the nation to have supported the top of every Republican ticket — Richard Nixon included — since the Grand



VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
A 1962 "Hoff for Governor"
Lithograph in Burlington.
Philip H. Hoff became
Vermont's first Democratic
governor in 1962.

Old Party's founding in 1854.
That changed 56 years
ago when Hoff, a young,
charismatic counterpart of
President John F. Kennedy,

HOFF, Page 6

Hoff

FROM PAGE 1

shattered political tradition — something he kept doing right up to his death Thursday at The Residence at Shelburne Bay at age 93.

"No individual deserves more credit (or in the view of political rivals more blame) for the transformation of Vermont than Philip Hoff," Samuel Hand, Anthony Marro and Stephen Terry wrote in their 2011 book "Philip Hoff: How Red Turned Blue in the Green Mountain State."

"Hoff would oversee changes more sweeping and dramatic than in any comparable period in the state's history before or since," the historians continued, "changes that would stay in place long after he had left the governor's office."

Changes many Vermonters may be surprised to find still shape their lives today.

During Hoff's tenure, the Vermont House reapportioned itself from a chamber where each of the state's 246 cities and towns had its own representative to the current 150-member body.

The newly streamlined Legislature went on to ban billboards that once cluttered state highways, move then-local welfare programs to Montpelier, end the poll tax as a voting requirement, convert the state income tax to a percentage of the federal rate, and create what's now the Vermont Student Assistance Corp., area agencies on aging, Legal Aid and Vermont Public Television.

Much of Hoff's agenda was so ahead of its time it wasn't approved until after his departure in 1969. Take his planting the idea of land-use planning that led to Act 250 under Gov. Deane Davis in the 1970s. Or his push to import Canadian electricity that drew power when Gov. Richard Snelling secured a contract with Hydro-Quebec in the 1980s. Or his call for a school funding law, requiring richer areas to help poorer ones, that mirrored the act signed by Gov. Howard Dean in the 1990s.

The father of four and grandfather of six continued to be a forward thinker out of office. An advocate against war and for civil rights, Hoff was the first mainstream politician to endorse Sanders during the independent's historic



ASSOCIATED PRESS FILE PHOTO

Philip H. Hoff and wife Joan wave in front of the Vermont Statehouse in January 1963, as he became the first Democratic governor in over 100 years. Hoff, who's credited with starting Vermont's transition from one of the most Republican-entrenched states in the country to one of the most liberal, died on Thursday, according to The Residence at Shelburne Bay, where he had been living.

congressional election in 1990 and an early supporter when the state became the first to adopt civil unions in 2000 and approve same-sex marriage without a court mandate in 2009.

"I've become more liberal," he once explained to this reporter, "because I've become more and more concerned."

'THE ONE TO TIP THE BALANCE'

Hoff, born in 1924 in the small town of Turners Falls, Massachusetts, was the son of a "rock-ribbed Republican" who owned a local foundry. He felt his first Democratic stirrings at age 8 when he watched Depression-era workers celebrate the 1932 win of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

"I remember my father by my side and he was waving to them, jovial," Hoff recalled. "They were good natured, but there was an undercurrent there, underneath it was a real edge. They were saying, 'You people no longer control my destiny — I'm going to have a fair say.' I picked that up."

Going on to graduate from Cornell Law School, Hoff moved to Burlington in 1951, lost a bid for City Council in the winter of 1960, then won a state House seat that fall. Two years after making headlines as a "Young Turk" in Montpelier, he announced he'd run against Republican Gov. F.

Hoff was two years older than Keyser, who, at age 35,

was the nation's youngest governor. But peers and the press described the incumbent as "competent" if "not an exciting guy." Hoff, in contrast, drew such adjectives as "tall," "blond" and "handsome" — attributes that helped him compensate for a lack of money and staff.

Terry, a former Vermont Press Bureau reporter who covered Hoff's second and third terms, tells a story about a campaign swing through the old Pownal Tannery. Two women were stacking hides when Hoff asked for their vote.

"This one lady turned to another," Terry recalls, "and said, 'He can put his shoes under my bed anytime he wants.'"

The only previous Democrat to serve as Vermont governor, John Robinson, did so only because he lost the 1853 vote yet, after no candidate polled 50 percent, won a fluke legislative tiebreaker by one ballot.

On election night a century later, Hoff trailed by less than 1,000 votes with just the Democratic stronghold of Winooski left to report.

"It became very clear," Hoff recalled, "they were deliberately holding the vote so that it would be the one to tip the balance."

Just before 1 a.m., Winooski went for the Democrat 1,768 to 188, catapulting him to a 1,348-vote (or 50.5 percent) statewide victory. Minutes later, the winner was whisked to the middle of the city. There was no platform or no speaker system. Still, the crowd that spilled into the streets could hear Hoff shout, "One hundred years of Republican bondage broken!"

That's when someone threw him a cut-out crown.

"King of Winooski," it said. Hoff put it on. A flashbulb popped. For one happy, heady moment, he was King of Vermont.

'STAND FOR WHAT YOU BELIEVE'

Hoff served as governor for three terms from 1963 to 1969, encompassing Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society.

"I was an issue-oriented reformer," he summed up his tenure, "who believed in change and opening up government to ordinary people. If you give them adequate information and respect them and honor them, they will do the right thing every time. The modern tendency in which people are not trusted, so you end up manipulating them, you do not give them the whole truth, you give them a distorted version of the facts — I'm violently opposed to that."

As leader of one of the whitest states in the nation, Hoff repeatedly spoke out for racial equality — a hot-button issue even before someone in a speeding car shot at the home of a black Northeast Kingdom minister in the "Irasburg Affair" of 1968.

That same year, Hoff was the first Democratic governor to break with President Lyndon Johnson over the Vietnam War, then endorse Robert Kennedy for the White

House, then call on then-Vice President Hubert Humphrey to resign as a gesture against the administration's battle plans.

Humphrey instead ran for president. Soon Democrats wanted the Vermont governor to run for vice president against fellow New Englander Edmund Muskie at their tumultuous convention in Chicago.

"They asked me to be a token challenge," Hoff recalled. "And if it had been anybody other than Ed Muskie, I would probably have gone through with it."

Things wouldn't settle down anytime soon.

"His growing opposition to the war and his growing advocacy of civil rights can be seen in retrospect as having been both correct and courageous," Hand, Marro and Terry wrote in their book. "But he took the right stands at the wrong time and in the process sowed the seeds of his political demise."

Hoff went on to lose a 1970 U.S. Senate bid after announcing he was an alcoholic — a bold move, just "not the smartest one," he said after. He returned to politics in 1982 to serve three terms in the state Senate.

"The truth of the matter is our administration — I say ours and not mine — set the agenda for Vermont for at least 25 years, and parts of it exist even today," he said.

Hoff had personal connections to many of the state's officeholders past and present. Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., started his law career in Hoff's firm and was appointed Chittenden County state's attorney by his boss in 1966. Tom Salmon, the state's second Democratic governor, was Hoff's Windham County campaign manager. Dean was once Hoff's doctor.

But in retirement, Hoff spent more time mulling over a question from his grandson.

"He said to me, 'Why is it that people won't stand up for the things they really believe in anymore?' I couldn't answer that. There's been a tendency for people who are in office to simply be involved with re-election as opposed to what they really should do. If you're only interested in holding the office, what's the sake of holding the office? It seems to me you ought to stand for what you believe."

Memorial arrangements have yet to be announced.

Leahy, Sanders And Welch Announce \$1.35 Million In Brownfields Grants for Vermont

Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.), Senator Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Representative Peter Welch (D-Vt.) announced Wednesday that four Vermont organizations will share a total of \$1.35 million in Brownfields Program assessment and cleanup grants from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Brownfields grants allow communities to clean up contaminated properties, facilitating their redevelopment and reuse and improving local economies.

In a joint statement, Leahy, Sanders and Welch said: "These sizeable grants are the latest Brownfields grants to improve Vermont communities and local economies. All across the state, there are properties that are

vacant and abandoned because of past contamination. These funds will help assess the extent of the contamination, as a first step towards cleaning them up and making them productive again. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the Brownfields program remains strong in Vermont and nationally, despite the current administration's proposal to reduce funding."

The Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission (CCRPC) was awarded a \$300,000 assessment grant, the Northeast Vermont Development Association was awarded a \$600,000 assessment grant, the Town of Springfield was awarded a \$250,000 assessment grant.

The Vermont River Conservancy was awarded

\$200,000 for a cleanup project in Brattleboro that will remove contaminated soils and allow the restoration of a 12-acre site as a public park on Whetstone Brook. Restoring this property, to mitigate the effect of frequent flooding, has long been a priority for the City of Brattleboro. Steve Libby, Director of the Vermont River Conservancy which owns the property, said: "Removing contaminated soils from the 'Sawdust Alley' property in downtown Brattleboro is a crucial first step in the restoration of a 12 acre floodplain on Whetstone Brook that will alleviate flood damage to downstream properties. The project will also provide a significant new open space area for Brattleboro residents to wander along the shoreline of Whetstone Brook and enjoy the birds and wildlife that will return

to this urban setting."

Leahy, Vice Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, was able to ensure that the final Omnibus Appropriations Act, signed into law last month, included \$80 million for Brownfields grants, an increase over the President's request. Sanders has authorization oversight of the Brownfields program as a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, which recently voted to extend the program till 2023 and make it easier for local governments and nonprofits to more quickly clean up contaminated sites. Welch has authorization oversight of the Brownfields program as a member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

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Sanders Introduces Two Amendments To Strengthen Opioid Crisis Response Bill

Washington, D.C. - Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) introduced two amendments to the Opioid Crisis Response Act of 2018 under consideration Tuesday in the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee.

The first amendment put forward by Sanders would impose retroactive civil fines on companies and executives that illegally marketed and/or distributed an opioid product and would punish future illegal activity with jail time for executives. The amendment is similar to legislation Sanders recently introduced to hold opioid makers accountable for their role in the

epidemic.

"We have not yet held accountable the drug manufacturers for the product that they have created and sold, when it is quite likely they knew that the product they were selling was in fact addictive," Sanders said. "It seems to me that what we have got to do is not only put federal money into fighting the opioid crisis, we have got to demand that those companies that manufactured the product and, in all likelihood, understood that product was addictive, understood that product was killing people, was wrecking human lives - they have got to be held accountable."

Sanders also renewed his call for the Senate to hold hearings with the executives of companies that manufacture opioids. "The time is long overdue that we do here in this committee what was done in 1994 in the House and that is bring the manufacturers of these opioids right here and under oath ask them what they knew and when they knew it in terms of the addictive powers of the products that they were selling," Sanders said.

Sanders' second amendment would double funding over five years for the National Health Service Corps. The National Health Service Corps plays a vital role

in strengthening the nation's primary care workforce. Currently, there are grave shortages in primary care across the country, and the National Health Service Corps has 10 times as many applicants as they have scholarship funding to accommodate. These shortages are worst in many of the same areas that are hardest hit by the opioid crisis.

This amendment, Sanders said, "is absolutely essential if we're going to have the on-the-ground personnel that we need to address the crisis."

Sanders' first amendment failed 8-15, and his second amendment failed 11-12.

KidSafe Recognizes Fu and Zuckerman at Annual Awards

Over 275 guests joined KidSafe Collaborative April 10 to recognize dedicated community members working to support families and protect children at the KidSafe Annual Outstanding Service Awards Luncheon at the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel and Conference Center. This year's awardees included two South Burlington residents, recent South Burlington High School (SBHS) graduate Charlene Fu and Pediatrics Resident Dr. Anna Zuckerman. Dr. Lewis First, Chief of Pediatrics at the University of Vermont (UVM) Children's Hospital, also a South Burlington resident, served as emcee alongside KidSafe Executive Director Sally Borden who presented the awards.

Fu was nominated by Service Rendered Inc., an organization working to reduce youth risk behaviors, for the Outstanding Volunteer Award. As an SBHS student, Fu saw the need for a place where young people could hang out and enjoy activities in a drug/alcohol/tobacco-free environment. Concerned about many of her fellow students who engaged in substance use, Fu proposed the creation of a teen youth center, and working as a volunteer, under the auspices of Service Rendered, took the lead in making it happen. Her vision, The Chill Out Center, located at the University Mall in South Burlington, is now a reality. The Chill Out Center provides a safe place for teens to interact and engage in a range of activities, from playing computer games to learning computer skills and English language support.

To achieve her vision, Fu outlined the plans for the center, recruited eight others to serve on the youth advisory board, and became the advisory board president. She presented to the South Burlington City Council multiple times, requesting financial support, and earning the council's trust and support. Fu also took charge of designing the space and coordinated the hanging of 30 large-scale artworks from fellow SBHS students to decorate the center. To date, at least 3,000 teens and parents have visited The Chill Out Center.

Perhaps most impressive, Fu only emigrated from China in 2014. For a young person new to the U.S. and adjusting to a drastically different culture and language



Charlene Fu



Anna Zuckerman. PHOTOS: GILLIAN RANDALL PHOTOGRAPHY

to engage fully in creating the center was truly remarkable. While deeply committed to the project, she still achieved academic success and now attends Middlebury College. As noted by Service Rendered Executive Director Bruce Wilson, "Few adults, much less teenagers, have been able to accomplish what Charlene has done. Charlene Fu absolutely amazed me with her vision, organizational skills, determination, and innovative spirit."

Zuckerman was recognized for her "above and beyond" commitment, receiving the 2018 Promising Young Professional Award. Zuckerman moved to South Burlington in 2016 to begin a pediatric residency at the UVM Children's Hospital after completing Columbia University Medical School, and then conducting research on school-based health centers in the Dominican Republic. UVM Children's Hospital members and the Winooski school community nominated her for her undertaking of an unusually challenging

child advocacy project, to develop and launch a School-Based Health Center in Winooski, which opened in early 2018.

The need was great, JFK School serves pre-K through high school students in Winooski, one of Vermont's most diverse communities. Many students are New Americans and English language learners. Zuckerman successfully "organized and orchestrated from the ground up" a medical clinic in a district that features ethnic diversity yet also has a challenging rate of poverty. Here, children may be at risk of not receiving needed medical attention because their parents have no transportation, cannot take time off from work, or have language barriers.

In establishing a school-based clinic, Zuckerman addressed these healthcare disparities head on. In addition to providing accessible health services right at the school, the clinic assists families with insurance eligibility, communicates with the child's primary care provider, and ensures the child has a medical home where his/her health care will continue.

The complicated process of organizing a new center required a team approach as well as leadership and vision. Zuckerman provided that leadership, undertaking all aspects of the work, from planning

and convening meetings throughout the community to writing grants to obtain funding – all the while completing her time-intensive residency program. The scope of the project, and the successful launch, are "above and beyond for someone so early in their career."

Within pediatrics, Zuckerman hopes to pursue a career in primary care. Outside of medicine, she loves being in the beautiful Vermont outdoors as well as learning languages, traveling, and sitting around campfires.

Additional 2018 award recipients were Mike Ohler for Outstanding Professional, Betsy Cain for Lifetime Achievement, and Sophia Donforth for the Janet S. Munt Prevention award. Also present to recognize the awardees were Governor Phil Scott, Burlington Chief of Police Brandon del Pozo, and representatives from Vermont Congressional offices.

The KidSafe Collaborative is a nonprofit organization that engages groups and individuals to work together to improve the community's prevention of and response to child abuse and neglect. They are a member agency of the United Way of Northwest Vermont.

KIDSAFE

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

Common Denominator

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To the Editor:

Wow, where to start on the letter "Response to Mr. Hauser (Caledonian Record, April 25, 2018) and its disparaging us flatlanders who have followed the path to Vermont first made by Vermont's more famous migrants like Ethan Allen, Ira Allen, Seth Warner, Thomas Chittenden, and others. These gentlemen who figured so much in Vermont's early history of European settlement (for better or worse) also shared another common denominator: all were originally flatlanders.

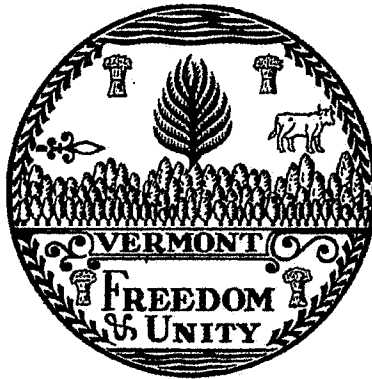
I am from the Boston, Massachusetts area, and I am proud of it. As a former flatlander, I have experienced and seen things that so many so-called native Vermonters could not possibly imagine in their wildest visions of loathing us flatlanders.

Judging from the tone of the letter, its author, Mr. Steve Fortin, would probably not like me because I am one of those accursed flatlanders. I am also one of those burnt cork liberals from the 60s that he railed against. I am proud that I am originally from the flatlands, a liberal, from the 60s, and now call Vermont my home just like those more famous of Vermont's ex-flatlanders — Ethan, Ira, Seth, Thomas,

and Bernie Sanders of our own day.

I do not know Mr. Fortin. Someday, I would enjoy meeting him. Yet, although Mr. Fortin and I would no doubt be on opposite sides of the social and political sphere, we share at least one common denominator: we are both flatlanders or descendants from them. I do not know how long Mr. Fortin has lived in Vermont, but I do know that, unless he is of Native American descent, either he or his ancestors originally emigrated to Vermont from somewhere else — the flatlands.

Walter Carpenter
Montpelier, Vermont



Articles of Interest

Opinion

VOICE OF THE FREE PRESS

Where is Gov. Scott's education policy?

Free Press Editorial Board
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Gov. Phil Scott is at it again, putting forward a late-session education initiative that largely leaves out anything about education.

The plan, presented to lawmakers on Tuesday, April 24, would push school boards to cut the number of teachers and other staff as a way to save money. Any district that fails to meet a state-mandated student-to-staff ratio would face tax penalties.

Brad James, education finance manager for the Vermont Agency of Education, told lawmakers the state could save an estimated \$45 million by increasing the student-to-staff ratio to 5.5 to 1, up from the current average of 5.15 to 1.

There's no clear explanation of how the administration came upon the target number.

The proposal — described by Adam Greshin, Scott's commissioner of finance and management, as not yet "fully vetted" — also offers little in the way of how individual school districts would reduce staff.

James, in his written testimony, did present this insight:

"Beginning the process now would allow time for districts to plan and strategize how to reduce staff and increase student/staff ratios in a thoughtful and meaningful manner so as not to adversely affect the education of students."

The plan, as presented, shows every sign of an administration that started with a dollar figure and backfilled to come up with a policy that fits, an approach that fails to put education first.

This isn't the first time the governor's education proposal reflected a similar outlook.

In January, Suzanne Young, Scott's administration secretary, issued a memo with a "menu" of "concepts" on how to meet a projected gap in the education fund, a document that only gave passing mention to maintaining the quality of education.

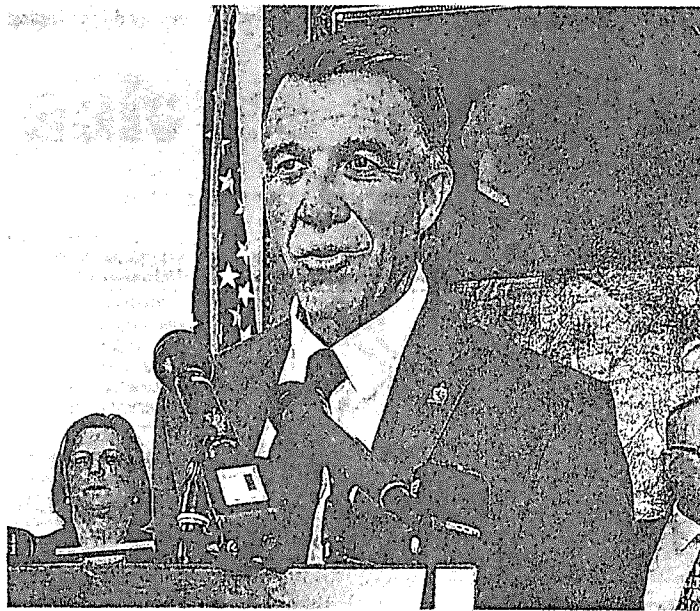
The staff ratio plan also was revealed almost to the day a year ago when the governor pressed lawmakers for a plan to save money on teacher health care plans — a move that ultimately led to a budget veto.

There's no question Vermont needs to make every effort to hold down the cost of public schools. But the goal should be to figure out how to deliver the education Vermont students need and deserve at the lowest cost possible.

The staff ratio proposal reinforces the impression that, when it comes to public schools, the Scott administration's main focus — perhaps its only focus — is cost and taxes.

Lawmakers should find the proposal difficult to support until the governor can explain how cutting teachers leads to better schools for Vermont's children.

Contact Engagement Editor Aki Soga at asoga@freepressmedia.com. Join the



Gov. Phil Scott speaks to reporters at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 5. On April 24, Gov. Scott rolled out a proposal to pressure schools to reduce staff.

APRIL MCCULLUM/FREE PRESS

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WCAAX-TV lays off six employees in push for 'efficiency'

Dan D'Ambrosio
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

WCAAX-TV in Burlington laid off six employees Friday in what the station's general manager described as an effort to focus resources in the right areas. The layoffs did not affect any on-air employees.

These are the first layoffs since the station was bought by Gray Television Group.

"What we're in the midst of doing is finding new ways to be able to report as efficiently as possible," General Manager Jay Barton said. "The layoffs in no way are a reflection on the individuals involved."

Barton said the employees who were let go worked in a variety of capacities, but acknowledged that one of those let go was news photographer Tyson Foster. Foster posted on Facebook Friday, saying, "Just got laid off. Who's hiring?"

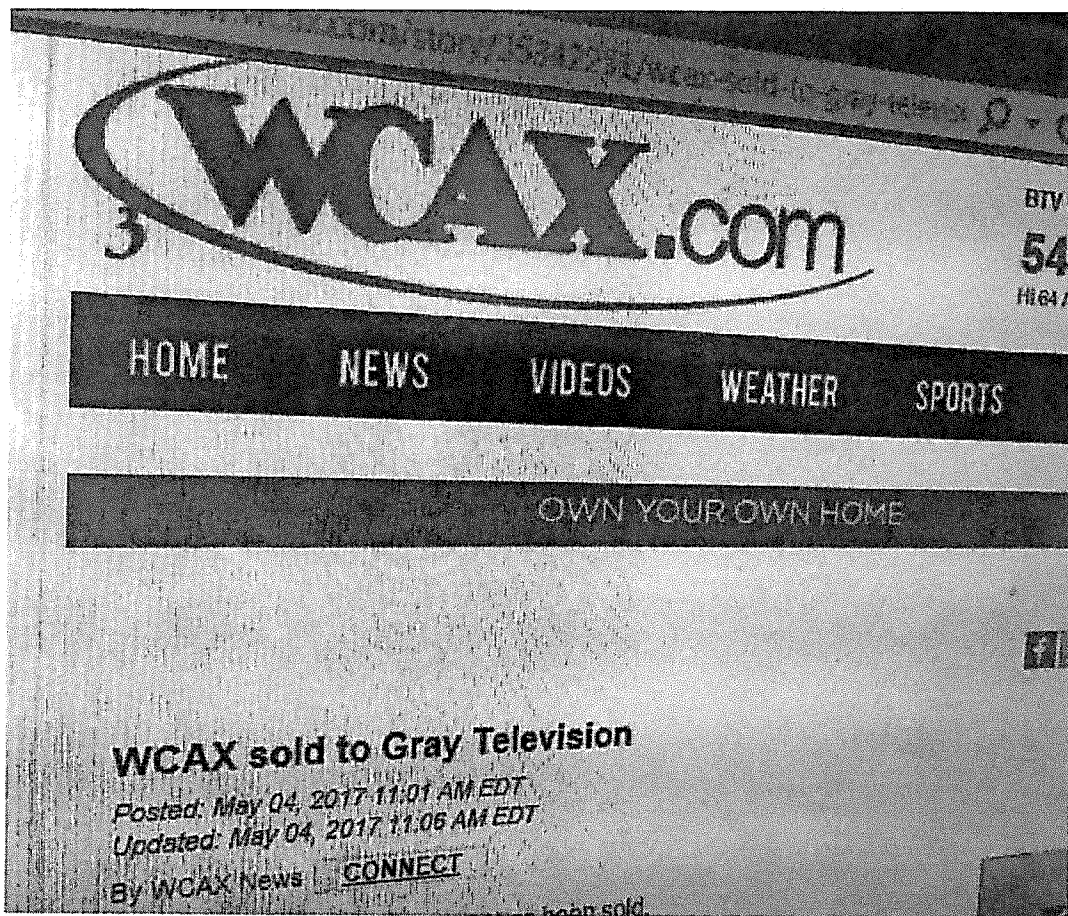
WCAAX was purchased in May 2017 by Atlanta-based Gray Television Group for \$29 million from the Martin family, which launched the station in 1954. At the time, Gray said no layoffs were planned.

Barton said Gray watched WCAAX operate for nearly a year before making the decision to reduce the staff by six employees. He said the decision was not based on a problem with revenues.

"The company has done some analysis that indicates we need to make staffing changes," Barton said. "These jobs are part of that."

Barton said he did not expect more layoffs. He said all of the employees laid off on Friday received severance packages. Some of those affected had only been on the job for a year, while others had worked for the station for a "couple of decades."

"This type of action is ideally something you only do once," he said. "That's the plan here."



A screen grab of the WCAAX announcement that the local CBS news affiliate is selling up in a tough market, May 4, 2017. FILE

Barton was named general manager when Gray Television Group took over operation of the station on June 1, 2017.

"We're trying to make the best choices

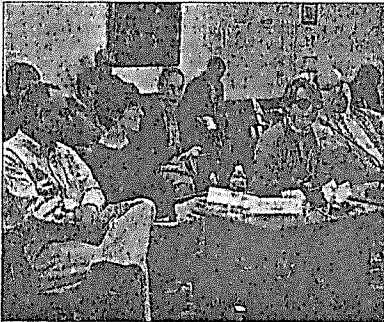
for the future, not just for today," Barton said. "But what I don't want to do is downplay is the fact these are real human beings being affected."

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More layoffs loom at Vermont Yankee

Brattleboro resident Lissa Weinmann, at microphone, addresses state legislators Thursday, during a hearing in Montpelier. Also at the table are fellow Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel members, from left, David Andrews, Kate O'Connor and Chris Campany.

MIKE FAHER — VTDIGGER



By MIKE FAHER
Reformer/VTDigger

MONTPELIER — Another round of job cuts will hit Vermont Yankee this year, further shrinking a workforce that once exceeded 600.

Only 10 to 15 employees will remain at the idled Vernon nuclear plant, after cuts that are expected before year's end — possibly in October.

Though that schedule has fluctuated, the layoffs are not a surprise. Still, the pending downsizing has spurred longtime employees such as David Andrews to finish their plans for the future

and take stock of a workplace that feels nearly deserted compared with its heyday.

"It is very surreal how different the place has become," said Andrews, a radiation protection technician who has worked at Vermont Yankee for 24 years. "And you do feel like a survivor."

Entergy stopped power production at Vermont Yankee in December 2014. At the time, there were about 550 employees.

The first big cutback happened the following month, when all fuel was permanently removed from the plant's reactor and the workforce was reduced to 316.

That number has continued to tumble. The last major layoff happened in May 2016, when Entergy said it was cutting staff to 136 in the wake of federally approved emergency-planning changes taking effect at the plant.

Between then and now, more than half the plant's remaining workforce has departed. On Thursday, while delivering a Vermont Yankee decommissioning update to state legislators, Entergy senior government affairs manager Joe Lynch said there are about 60 employees at the plant.

LAYOFFS, Page 3

Layoffs

FROM PAGE 1

That does not include security personnel. That service was contracted to a private company in 2016.

The next job cuts will happen after crews finish moving the plant's spent fuel from a cooling pool to sealed casks. At that point, the site's highest level of security and almost all of its operational functions will be focused on two relatively small concrete pads hosting those casks.

The handful of employees who remain after the layoffs "would have responsibilities to maintain our obligations under our federal license to oversee the fuel, do certain maintenance work and monitoring work," Lynch said.

Those functions will be necessary regardless of whether or not the plant is sold to NorthStar Group Services. While NorthStar is promising an accelerated decommissioning project, Vermont Yankee's spent fuel will remain on the property for the foreseeable future due to the lack of a federal repository for such material.

NorthStar is hoping to complete its purchase at the end of 2018. And the company has pledged to retain the small number of Vermont Yankee staffers who would still be working at the site at that point.

For those who are losing their jobs later this year, Lynch said Entergy is offering help finding positions at other nuclear sites within the company. The company also is working with the state Department of Labor to coordinate assistance for those who will seek employment elsewhere.

"The same things that we did for the other staff reductions are being offered," Lynch said.

For Andrews, the decision is already made. He's planning to retire, saying he and his wife have been saving "every penny we could" in anticipation of the day his job would be eliminated.

"When this is done, we're most likely going to move out of state," Andrews said. "I don't see anything in my future that says I'm going to be here, working this decommissioning."

Andrews is part of a smaller subset of the plant's staff. He's a member of Local 300 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

At its peak, the union had as many as 180 members working at Vermont Yankee. That number consistently stayed in the 160s, with union members filling a variety of positions at the plant, said Jeffrey Wimet, the

local's business manager.

There are now just 11 union members employed at Vermont Yankee. After the next round of cutbacks, there will be none.

Andrews, who represents the union on the Vermont Nuclear Decommissioning Citizens Advisory Panel, told lawmakers on Thursday that he's a member of an "endangered species."

In a later interview, Andrews said the most-recent notice he's received says layoffs will happen in late October. That date "could get pushed back. But it's not going to be pushed back very far," Andrews said. "Nobody's expecting to be here past Christmas."

He added that, among his coworkers, there are still many questions about the future. "That's perhaps the most stressful thing for the workers - not having certainty on where you're going," Andrews said.

The coming layoffs are dependent on completion of Vermont Yankee's fuel-storage project. That project was suspended in early March after Entergy was notified that a small cask component - variously described as a bolt or a shim support - had come loose at San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station in California.

The same company that makes San Onofre's casks manufactures the casks used at Vermont Yankee.

Lynch told lawmakers that Entergy has conducted "painstaking" inspections of its casks and has not found the problem that was discovered at San Onofre.

He added that Entergy remains "confident" that the company will meet its goal of storing all spent fuel by the end of this year. Crews must load 16 more casks to complete the project.

In statements issued Thursday, both Entergy and the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission indicated that the Vermont Yankee fuel move is about to restart.

NRC spokesman Neil Sheehan said Entergy "began cask-loading activities recently," but "is still working through some issues." The key point is that there were no issues identified with respect to the bolts and the stand-down on loading was ended," Sheehan said.

Lynch added that Entergy is "going through the steps to recommence the fuel-loading campaign."

"The work is progressing carefully and methodically, with safety as the top priority," Lynch said. "We have taken initial steps but not yet placed any casks in the campaign onto the concrete pads."

Lawmakers try to help dairy farmers

MONTPELIER — Vermont legislators are drafting an emergency rescue package to help the state's struggling dairy farmers.

The package from the Senate Appropriations Committee includes access to low-cost loans of up to \$150,000 to help cash-strapped farmers buy fertilizer and feed for the spring. WPTZ-TV reports wholesale milk prices remain below the cost of production for many dairy operations.

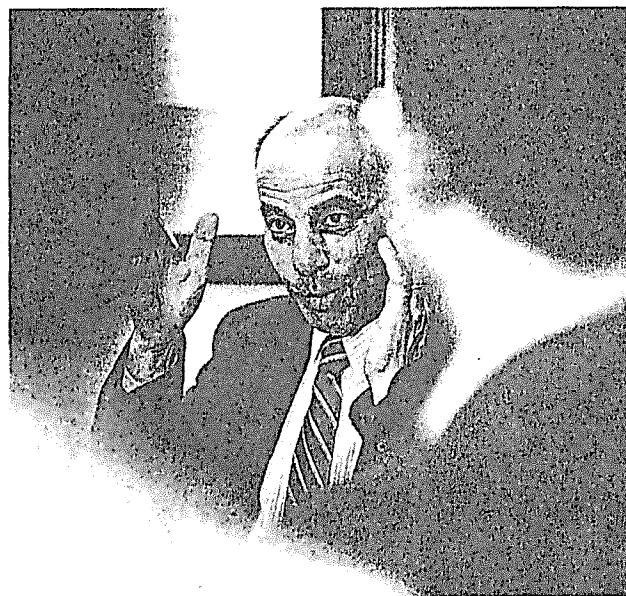
A second component will pay to help provide for milk insurance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Farm economists say milk prices will begin to rise in 2019, but Senate officials say many farmers may not be able to survive this year without help.

Vermont



Adam Greshin, Vermont's commissioner of finance and management, wearing striped tie at head of table right, testifies before the House Education Committee at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24. PHOTOS BY GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS



Adam Greshin, Vermont's commissioner of finance and management, testifies about education cost containment before the House Education Committee on April 24.

VT Legislature: 5 unresolved issues to watch

April McCullum
Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

MONTPELIER - As the temperature rises, you'll often find the massive front door of the Vermont Statehouse open wide, beckoning eager lawmakers to set aside their work for the summer — and campaign season.

A few major decisions stand in their way. For the second year in a row, the Legislature and Gov. Phil Scott are uneasily posturing as they prepare for another veto standoff around education taxes.

The two-year legislative session is expected to end on or around May 12, which is also when the General Assembly's budget runs out, said Senate President Pro Tempore Tim Ashe. Here are some

key issues to watch in the final two weeks.

1. Will the Legislature avoid a property tax hike by using one-time money — again?

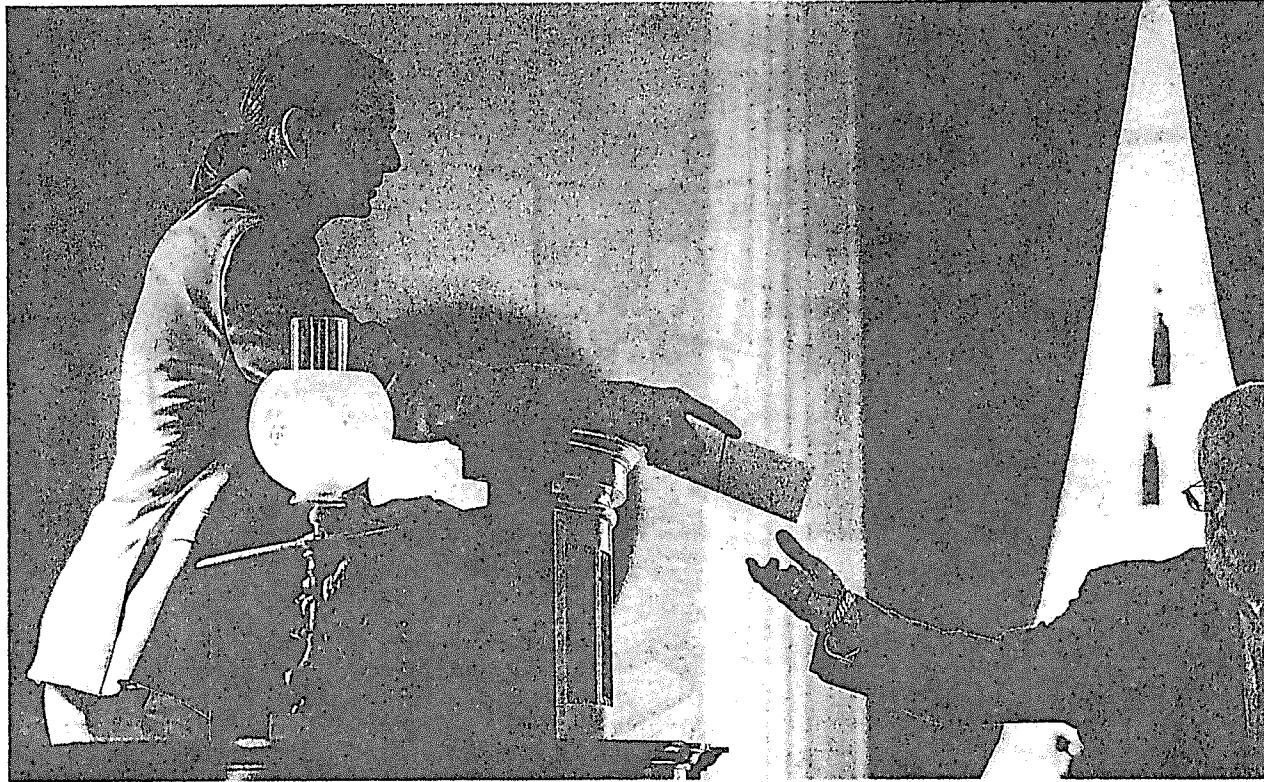
Gov. Scott won't budge on his promise not to raise tax rates or fees, even if it means relying on temporary fixes.

Property tax rates are projected to rise about 7 cents in fiscal year 2019, according to the most recent estimates from the Legislature's fiscal analysts.

Some of the projected tax increase stems from last year's state budget veto, when lawmakers and Scott agreed to use \$35.2 million in one-time money to avoid a tax increase for fiscal year 2018.

See LEGISLATURE, Page 4A

Vermont



Lt. Governor David Zuckerman, left, presides as the Senate considers a bill redefining the term domestic terrorism at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24.

PHOTOS BY GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Legislature

Continued from Page 3A

The governor has suggested that he would avoid a tax increase by finding millions of dollars elsewhere in the budget — but no one on his administration has said where the money would come from. The state would need to come up with about \$58.2 million to avoid a property tax increase. (The governor's administration pegs the figure at \$56 million.)

"I'm confident we can find the money. It won't be easy, but we can find the money."

Gov. Phil Scott

"I'm confident we can find the money," Scott told reporters last week. "It won't be easy, but we can find the money."

The governor says he would consider this money an "investment" paired with a longer-term plan to reduce education

costs. That plan has not yet materialized, but this week his administration suggested pressuring some school districts to reduce staffing levels.

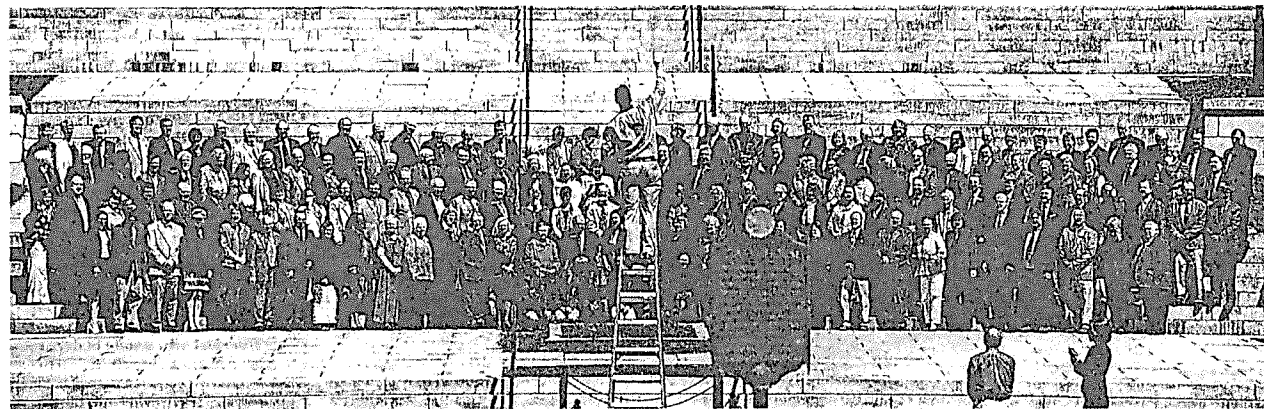
Democratic leaders have panned the idea of using one-time money.

"I think part of the problem is the governor has created a situation for himself which is almost impossible to work out of," said Ashe, D/P-Chittenden.

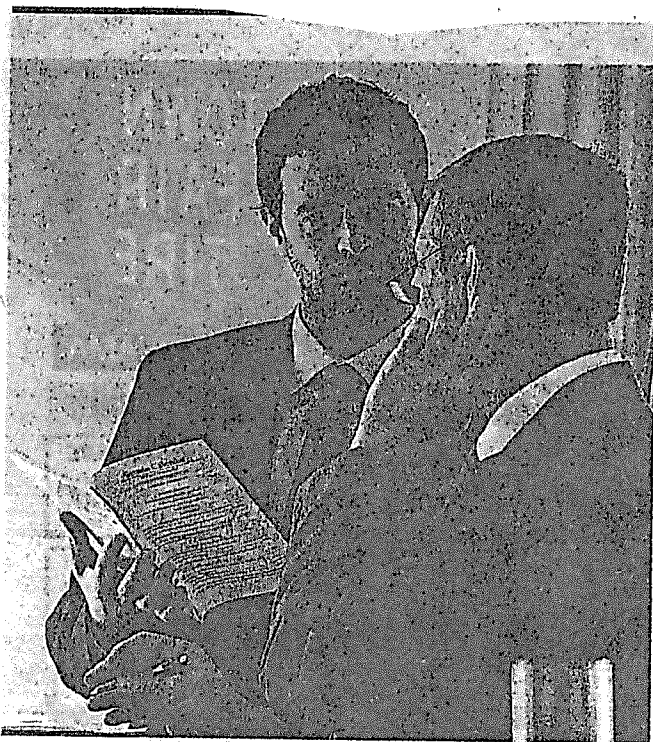
"One-time money just kicks the can down the road," said House Speaker Mitzi Johnson, D-South Hero. "It puts us in a bigger pickle next year."

House Democrats have their own plan: to lower property taxes by shifting some of the burden to the income tax.

See LEGISLATURE, Page 6A



Photographer Andy Duback takes a group portrait of the members of the House of Representatives on the steps of the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24.



Sen. Tim Ashe, D/P-Chittenden, left, confers with Secretary of the Senate John Bloomer Jr. at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Legislature

Continued from Page 4A

That proposal is still winding through the Senate but is unlikely to win Scott's support.

"This is the point where it's the administration's job to come to the table and work with the legislature on proposals," Johnson said, "so that we don't have to drag this out and leave school districts and taxpayers in limbo."

2. How will lawmakers work to prevent school threats and gun violence?

The alleged school shooting plot in Fair Haven, which surfaced in February, is continuing to shake up the Statehouse. As prosecutors have faltered in their effort to prosecute attempted murder charges against 18-year-old Jack Sawyer, Scott and legislators have moved to close what they see as loopholes in the state's criminal laws.

The House of Representatives is leading an effort to redefine what constitutes an attempted crime for eight serious violent felonies. The House bill would define an "attempt" as a substantial step toward committing the crime, but mandatory minimum prison sentences would no longer apply to attempts.

The Senate has passed a bill outlawing "domestic terrorism," defined as engag-

ing in any activity to kill or injure multiple people, or threatening "any civilian population with mass destruction, mass killings, or kidnapping."

Other proposed changes include increased penalties for possessing a dangerous weapon with a violent intent. The Fair Haven case also motivated the passage of three gun-related laws earlier this year.

3. Will Democrats force Gov. Scott to veto a bill he opposes?

Scott has threatened to veto a long list of bills that he says would raise taxes or fees, lead to taxes or fees, or increase the cost of doing business in Vermont.

The list includes the Democratic plan to raise the minimum wage to \$15 per hour by 2024. Scott, who believes that economic improvements will cause "organic wage growth," has not been willing to negotiate on the proposed minimum wage hike.

Scott also opposes a proposed family and medical leave insurance program, which would be funded through a mandatory tax on employees.

Both bills have been Democratic priorities for two years and could become rallying points for Democratic voters if Scott vetoes them.

Ashe, the Senate leader, says the two bills are not aimed at the elections: "There is no issue on the table right now

See LEGISLATURE, Page 7A

Legislature

Continued from Page 6A

that has any of the hallmarks of a political finger in the eye," Ashe said.

Scott also opposes the House income and property tax overhaul. Eric Davis, professor emeritus of political science at Middlebury College, predicts that a tax bill veto would benefit Scott more than it would help the Democrats. A tax dispute, Davis suggested, would help the governor regain some support among a Republican base that's angry about gun laws.

4. How will Vermont pay for clean water efforts?

Vermont still has not found a long-term plan to pay for federally-mandated water quality efforts. A working group entrusted with that task last year failed to agree on a solution and instead recommended a short-term reliance on existing resources.

The Senate wants to create another legislative committee that would design a clean water fee, and would also direct the state's Clean Water Board to come up with a funding plan.

The House is working on a version of the bill that would impose a \$2 per night fee on hotel stays beginning in 2020 if the Legislature does not land on an alternative.

Scott has balked at any bill that envi-

sions a fee.

"I still believe that growing the economy, making Vermont more affordable and growing revenues organically are going to give us the money that we need, the resources needed, for continued water quality issues," Gov. Scott said earlier this month. "But I don't think the knee-jerk reaction should just necessarily be to just add another fee."

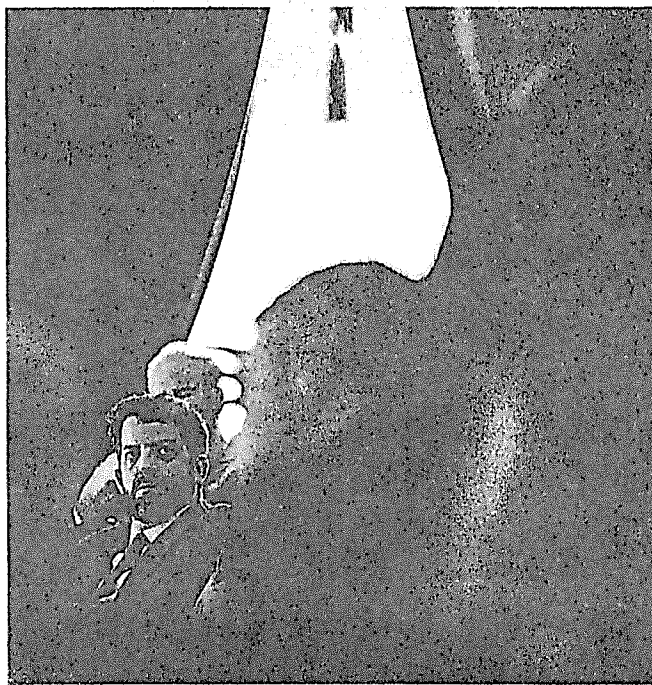
5. How will the Legislature address the need for psychiatric beds?

The state budget and capital spending bills may include money to ease Vermont's lack of mental health beds.

The Senate is drafting a plan to use up to \$5.5 million to fund at least 12 beds at the Brattleboro Retreat, pending a final agreement between the Retreat and the Agency of Human Services. Most of the money would come through the capital bill.

Another \$600,000 in the capital bill could fund the creation of a "therapeutic environment" at Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility in South Burlington and the Northwest State Correctional Facility in Swanton. The money would create a total of 13 beds for people at those facilities who do not need inpatient hospitalization but "would benefit from a more therapeutic placement."

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Sen. Chris Pearson, P/D-Chittenden, left, listens as Sen. Dick Sears, D-Bennington, right, explains a bill redefining the term domestic terrorism at the Statehouse in Montpelier on April 24. GLENN RUSSELL/FREE PRESS

Opinion

MY TURN

What has happened to Vermont?

James Ehlers
Special to Burlington Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

An image of sparkling blue lakes has been replaced by poisonous blue-green algae. The idea most Vermonters have of a clean environment and safe water has been jolted by chemical contamination in the water sources of Bennington and Rutland. Popular beaches are closed due to e.coli contamination.

Devastating, fatal illnesses have been linked to these algal blooms. The National Institute of Health has been studying links to increased incidence of fatal neurodegenerative ALS around lakes with cyanobacteria, as well as non-alcoholic liver disease.

We have an obligation to act right away. To clean up our lakes and rivers, and prevent damaging nutrients from entering them, every Vermonter must pitch in. In the urban areas, residents must capture their own stormwater just as they compost or recycle. In rural areas, new development must come with new infrastructure. We must support small Vermont farms over big agriculture and ensure our waterways are free of animal waste and pesticides.

In 2016, the Vermont Drinking Water

and Groundwater Protection Division issued 797 violations for offenses such as failing to properly treat water or having too high a level of contaminants — everything from radium to e.coli. This is far too high. Yet, we have unique challenges here in Vermont, including the fact that small community water systems that serve less than 3,300 people serve nearly 40 percent of the state's population (nationally, such systems serve closer to 10 percent of the population).

As rural downtowns grow, an outcome we wish to encourage, we must keep those water systems safe. We have to support our small and large community water systems by upgrading their infrastructure and providing easy-to-follow rules. Yet we also have to enforce our existing laws and develop new regulations that ensure the safety of our citizens.

On April 22, in honor of Earth Day, I released a 10-point plan to address water quality in Vermont that could be put into action right away, accessible on my website, JamesEhlersForVermont.com.

However, though of course we need creative thinking and new technologies, the reality is this: We know what works.

We know what needs to be done, but no governor has been willing to do it.

It takes money. It takes enforcement.



James Ehlers, executive director of Lake Champlain International, on July 27, 2017, raises concerns over current plans designed to clean up Lake Champlain, saying they just won't work. RYAN MERCER/FREE PRESS

It takes commitment. It takes putting the health of people over the profits of chemical companies. And every governor seems to think that the next person can handle it. By that point, our lakes and drinking water will be in dire condition — and costs will be far higher — unless we act today.

The last time I wrote a piece on the

lake, I called us as citizens to action, to fight for our health and our lives. Now, I am running for governor — because I believe we can succeed. I believe Vermont can lead on a people-first economy and a healthy environment. That is the Vermont way, and, together we will do it.

James Ehlers, of Winooski, is a Democratic candidate for governor.